

Executive Summary

Introduction

The City of Harrisonburg Comprehensive Plan presents a vision of what kind of community the City would like to be in the future and identifies the steps required to move toward that vision. The Plan provides information about the City's current conditions, long-term goals and objectives, and recommended implementation strategies. It addresses a wide range of issues, including land use, housing, transportation, infrastructure, the preservation of historic and natural resources, and economic development.

As a long-term guide for the community, the Plan helps City leaders make decisions about the location, scale, and quality of new development; the improvement of neighborhoods and commercial areas; the revitalization of downtown and surrounding historic areas; the extension and upgrade of roads and utilities; and the future of the City's parks, public spaces, and natural areas. The plan is adopted to set the City's growth and development policies for the next five years within a long-term planning horizon of twenty years.

This executive summary provides a brief synopsis of the Comprehensive Plan by presenting its primary recommendations: the Vision Statement & Goals, Plan Framework, Land Use Guide, and Master Transportation Plan. The reader is encouraged to refer to the complete Comprehensive Plan document to gain a full understanding of all the policies therein.

Vision Statement & Goals

The Comprehensive Plan provides an opportunity for the City to articulate its vision for the future – what kind of city it would like to be in the next twenty years and beyond. The vision guides the development of the goals, objectives, and strategies for action that make up the policies of the plan.

Vision Statement

The City of Harrisonburg presents its vision for the future as follows:

The City of Harrisonburg – where citizens are inspired to work together to create a great place to live, to raise a family, to learn, to work and to prosper.

Goals for Achieving the Vision

The City of Harrisonburg sets the following goals for achieving the vision:

- Goal 1. To improve the quality and compatibility of land use and development.
- Goal 2. To promote novel patterns of development like those developed early in the City's history – vital, well planned and well integrated mixed-housing and mixed-use urban areas of distinct character.
- Goal 3. To strengthen existing neighborhoods and promote the development of new neighborhoods that are quiet, safe, beautiful, walkable, enhance social interaction, and offer a balanced range of housing choices.

- Goal 4. To meet the current and future needs of residents for affordable housing.
- Goal 5. To provide a wide and equitably distributed range of educational opportunities for all ages.
- Goal 6. To provide a wide and equitably distributed range of arts and cultural opportunities for all ages.
- Goal 7. To celebrate the City's heritage and preserve and protect its historic resources as essential elements of the City's economic health, aesthetic character, and sense of place.
- Goal 8. To preserve and enhance the City's natural resources and encourage development that is compatible with nature.
- Goal 9. To meet the recreation needs of every citizen by providing comprehensive leisure opportunities and developing and maintaining a safe, well-distributed park and recreation system.
- Goal 10. To develop and maintain a safe and convenient transportation system serving all modes of travel, such as, automobile, pedestrian, bicycle and transit.
- Goal 11. To support a vital city with community facilities, infrastructure and services, which are efficient, cost-effective and conserving of resources.
- Goal 12. To ensure the provision of utility services to residents, businesses and customers.
- Goal 13. To ensure the public safety and encourage the provision of excellent health services for all people.
- Goal 14. To retain and enhance the City's role as the economic and tourism hub of the region, offering a variety of jobs in those sectors that enhance the City's ability to expand its economic base.
- Goal 15. To enhance and revitalize existing residential and commercial areas.
- Goal 16. To coordinate and collaborate with Rockingham County, Rockingham Memorial Hospital, James Madison University, Eastern Mennonite University, faith based organizations, and others to meet these goals.
- Goal 17. To engage all citizens to work collaboratively in planning, developing, and promoting the City as a great place.
- Goal 18. To keep this plan vital and useful by regularly reviewing its recommendations and the progress toward meeting them.

Plan Framework

The Plan Framework Map provides an overview of the main ideas and themes addressed in the Comprehensive Plan. The map highlights areas where some degree of change is encouraged or anticipated. The following table summarizes the guiding policies for each highlighted area on the map. The Plan Framework Map is found in Chapter 4.

Plan Framework Guiding Policies

Framework	Guiding Policies
City Gateways	Strengthening the City's image and attractiveness by improving entries.
Corridor Enhancement Areas	Improving the condition, character and quality of primary and secondary travel corridors.
Greenway Park System	Providing a connected system of parks and greenways.
Low Density Mixed Residential	Encouraging a mix of large and small-lot single family detached residential development areas combined with parks and green spaces.
Medium Density Mixed Residential	Encouraging a mix of small-lot single family detached and attached residential development areas combined with parks and green spaces.
Mixed Use Development Areas	Promoting planned mixed use areas offering innovative combinations of residential and business development.
Downtown Revitalization Area	Reviving downtown as the heart of the City – the civic, economic, cultural, and symbolic center of city life.
Edom Road Revitalization Area	Promoting reinvestment and sensitive redevelopment in this older commercial and industrial district.
Neighborhood Conservation Areas	Improving the quality of life in the City's mature neighborhoods to improve housing conditions, to reduce land use conflicts, and other issues.

The Comprehensive Plan contains many strategies for implementing the Plan Framework, including the development of detailed neighborhood and district plans, needed changes to the Zoning Ordinance to allow novel types of new development, revitalization incentive packages, and planned transportation and infrastructure improvements.

Land Use Guide

One of the primary functions of a comprehensive plan is to set forth a community's policies regarding the future use of land. To that end, the City has developed a Land Use Guide Map, included in Chapter 5. The City will use this map to guide its decisions regarding development proposals from the private sector, such as rezonings and special use permits. The City will also use the map for planning its own facilities and for influencing state and federal agencies to plan their facilities. The following categories of land uses are shown on the Land Use Guide Map. Both this text and the map must be consulted to understand the City's land use recommendations.

Low Density Residential

These areas consist of single family detached dwellings with a maximum density of 1 to 4 units per acre. Low density sections are found mainly in and around well established neighborhoods.

The low density residential areas are designed to maintain the existing character of neighborhoods and to provide traditional areas for home ownership.

Low Density Mixed Residential

These large undeveloped areas located at the edge of the City are planned for residential development containing a mix of large and small-lot single family detached dwellings and attractive green spaces. Planned “open space” (also known as “cluster”) developments are encouraged. The intent is to allow innovative residential building types and permit creative subdivision design solutions that promote neighborhood cohesiveness, walkability, connected street grids, community green spaces, and protection of environmental resources. Such innovative residential building types as zero lot-line development and patio homes will be considered as well as other new single family residential forms. The gross density of development in these areas should be in the range of 1 to 6 dwelling units per acre.

Neighborhood Residential

These are older neighborhoods, which can be characterized by large housing units on small lots. This type of land use highlights those neighborhoods in which existing conditions dictate the need for careful consideration of the types and densities of future residential development. Infill development and redevelopment must be designed so as to be compatible with the existing character of the neighborhood.

Medium Density Residential

The medium density residential areas are designated in areas near major thoroughfares or commercial areas. Most of these areas have been developed or are approved for development of a variety of housing types such as single-family, duplex, and in special circumstances, apartments. Depending on the specific site characteristics, densities in these areas may range from 1 to 15 units per acre.

Medium Density Mixed Residential

These largely undeveloped areas continue the existing medium density character of adjacent areas, but in a different form. They are planned for small-lot single family detached and single family attached neighborhoods where green spaces are integral design features. Apartments could also be permitted under special circumstances. They should be planned communities that exhibit the same innovative features as described for the low density version of mixed residential development described above. The gross density of development in these areas should be in the range of 4 to 12 dwelling units per acre and commercial uses would be expected to have an intensity equivalent to a Floor Area Ratio of at least 0.4, although the City does not measure commercial intensity in that way.

High Density Residential

A number of areas in the City have been developed in high density residential use, mostly apartment buildings at densities ranging from 12 to 24 dwelling units per acre. Many of these existing clusters of multifamily development and adjacent areas approved or planned for such development are identified as high density residential on the Land Use Guide.

Mixed Use Development Areas

The Mixed Use Development category includes both existing and proposed new mixed use areas. Downtown is an existing area that exhibits and is planned to continue to contain a mix of land uses. The quality and character of the mix of uses in downtown should be governed by a downtown revitalization plan, as recommended in Chapter 14, Revitalization. New mixed use areas shown on the Land Use Guide map are intended to combine residential and non-residential uses in planned neighborhoods where the different uses are finely mixed instead of separated. Quality architectural design features and strategic placement of green spaces will ensure development compatibility. These areas are prime candidates for “live-work” and traditional neighborhood developments. Live-work developments combine residential and office/service uses allowing people to both live and work in the same area. Live-work spaces may be combined in the same building or on the same street. All buildings have a similar residential scale. Traditional neighborhood development permits integrated mixing of residential, retail, office and employment uses to create a neighborhood with the following characteristics:

- The design of the neighborhood allows residents to work, shop, and carry out many of life’s other activities within the neighborhood.
- A mix of land uses is provided. The proximity of uses allows residents to walk, ride a bicycle, or take transit for many trips between home, work, shopping, and school.
- A variety of housing types is provided at a range of densities, types (multifamily, townhouse, and single family), and costs. Neighborhoods are heterogeneous mixes of residences in close proximity to commercial and employment uses.
- The neighborhood includes a retail, office, employment, and/or entertainment core to provide economic and social vitality, as well as a major focus and meeting place in the community.
- The circulation system serves many modes of transportation and provides choices for alternative transportation routes. Streets, alleys, and pedestrian and bike paths connect to the surrounding area. Streets and alleys generally follow a grid pattern to provide these route choices and connections. Traffic calming techniques may be used to reduce vehicle speed and increase pedestrian and bicycle safety.
- The overall intensity of development is designed to be high enough to support transit service.
- A system of parks; open spaces; and civic, public, and institutional uses is included to create a high quality of life and civic identity for the community.
- The cluster concept is embraced so as to concentrate development in environmentally suitable areas and to preserve and protect important environmental and cultural resources.

The gross residential density in areas outside downtown should not exceed an average of 15 units per acre, though all types of residential units are permitted: single family detached, single family attached and apartments. Apartments are permitted only if single family detached and/or attached units are also provided and together cover a greater percentage of the project site. Residential densities in downtown may be higher than an average of 15 units per acre, and commercial uses would be expected to have an intensity equivalent to a Floor Area Ratio of at least 0.4, although the City does not measure commercial intensity in that way.

Commercial

Commercial uses include retail, office, wholesale, or service functions. Restaurant and lodging uses are also included. These areas are generally found along the City’s major travel corridors.

The largest concentration of commercial land use is located between E. Market Street and Reservoir Street and includes the Valley Mall, a number of shopping centers, and significant office development.

Planned Business

These areas are suitable for commercial development but need careful controls to ensure compatibility with adjacent land uses. The maintenance of functional and aesthetic integrity should be emphasized in review of applications for development and redevelopment and should address such matters as: control of access; use of service roads or reverse frontage development; landscaping and buffering; parking; setback; signage; building mass and height; and orientation in regard to aesthetic concerns.

Professional

These areas are designated for professional service oriented uses with consideration to the character of the area. These uses are found in the residential areas along major thoroughfares and adjacent to the Central Business District. Conversion of houses in these areas to office and professional service uses is permitted with appropriate attention to maintaining compatibility with adjacent residential areas in the same manner as described for Planned Business areas.

Industrial

These areas are composed of land and structures used for light and general manufacturing, wholesaling, warehousing, high-technology, research and development and related activities. They include the major existing and future employment areas of the City.

Public/Semi-Public

These lands are designated for public and semi-public use. They include lands owned or leased by the Commonwealth of Virginia, the federal government, the City of Harrisonburg, and other governmental organizations. Examples of uses included in this category are public schools, libraries, City Hall and City administrative and support facilities. City parks are included in the Conservation, Recreation and Open Space category

Institutional

Lands designated for development by certain nonprofit and public institutional uses such as private colleges and universities, hospitals, offices of nonprofit organizations, community assembly uses and institutions that provide for the shelter and care of people.

Conservation, Recreation and Open Space

The City's parks and golf course are included in this category, as well as private open space recreation uses, such as country clubs.

Master Transportation Plan

A well planned community sets policies for land use and transportation that are coordinated. In support of the land uses recommended in the Land Use Guide and the development changes recommended by the Plan Framework Map, the Plan also incorporates a Master Transportation Plan. This plan consists of maps, tables, and other plans. The Street Improvement Plan is an important component of the overall Master Transportation Plan as it recommends improvements

to the City's transportation system. The Street Improvement Plan is listed and described in map form in Chapter 11. Improvements to the transportation system include not only road improvements, but also recommended bicycle facilities, changes in the rail system, and greenway trails.

Implementation and Periodic Review of the Plan

Preparation of a comprehensive plan is worthwhile only if the plan is used and its recommendations are implemented. This plan recommends an ambitious array of goals, objectives, and strategies for achieving its vision for the future. It should be understood that the recommendations cannot be implemented all at once. Chapter 16, however, lists strategies that the City has given high priority and should be considered for implementation in the first five years after this plan is adopted.

While recognizing that it is important to follow through on the Plan's recommendations, the City also understands that the plan is not set in stone. Circumstances change and new opportunities arise; therefore, the City pledges to review the Plan's recommendations periodically, at least once every five years, to ensure that the Plan is kept up-to-date and continues to provide useful and beneficial recommendations.